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Hilary M. White

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Running Head: MULLING OVER LONG DISTANCE CONFLICT

Mulling over Long Distance Conflict

Hilary M. White

Capstone Project: CST 416 Conflict and Negotiation

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In Partial Fulfillment of Graduation Requirements

University of Portland

Department of Communication Studies

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the effect of mulling or ruminating a conflict over a long distance relationship. Specifically, this study examined if there was a difference between the amount of mulling men and women engage in during a long distance relationship and how mulling related to satisfaction. Different types of long distance relationships (friendship, family members, and romantic partners) were analyzed with regard to the amount they mull. A modified version of Cloven and Roloff's (1991) research method was used to measure the amount of mulling. Results showed there was no difference between the sexes and the amount they mull; mulling was correlated with relational satisfaction; and romantic partners in long distance relationships mull more than friends and families at a distance.

## **Introduction**

After having a conflict with another person, it is difficult not to think about everything that was exchanged. Thinking extensively about a conflict is the essence of mulling. Cloven and Roloff (1991) define mulling as prolonged thinking in regards to interpersonal problems. Mulling and "rumination" are terms which are used interchangeably. This study examines the effects of mulling on conflict in long distance relationships. First, we will examine mulling effects in conflict, the effect of distance on a conflict, and finally we will investigate self-distancing, gender differences, and imagined interactions. After reviewing the literature on mulling, conflicts, and long distance relationships, we propose a research study to investigate how mulling affects conflict in long distance relationships, how satisfaction changes when mulling over conflict, and the impact of long distance when dealing with a conflict.

## **Literature Review**

### **Defining Rumination/Mulling**

Coleman, Goldman, and Kugler (2009) define rumination as self-focused attention and refers to directing attention particularly on one's own negative mood (p. 118). Coleman et al. (2009) explained how recalling and ruminating about experiences with humiliation and anger can motivate the perpetuation of aggressive behavior (p. 117). Coleman et al. (2009) acknowledge other studies that found rumination increases the emotional experience of anger and intentions to engage in aggressive behavior (p. 118). The catharsis theory reflects the alternative, that expressing negative emotions will dilute them (Coleman et al., 2009). However, Bushman (2002) who found that rumination increased anger and aggression, disproved catharsis theory and found that doing nothing at all was more effective than venting anger.

Martin and Tesser (1996), who have contributed to a theory of rumination, explain that rumination happens when there is an inconsistency between individuals' goals and their awareness of their ability to meet those goals (Martin & Tesser, 1996). According to Martin and Tesser (1996) individuals ruminate about goals that are achievable and significant to themselves and they are likely to ruminate until their goal is reached or they decide that the goal is no longer significant (Martin & Tesser, 1996). Though their theory pertains to ruminating and achieving life goals, their findings might be applied to conflict, rumination, and alternatives to rumination if it does not well serve a participant in conflict.

### **Effects of Mulling**

Cloven and Roloff (1991) studied how mulling amplified conflict. They found that the more individuals think about major conflicts, conflicts that occur all the time and that are bothersome, the more they perceive that thinking makes them feel worse about the problem

(Cloven & Roloff, 1991, p. 143). Similarly, mulling was not found to be statistically correlated with improving one's understanding of the problem (Cloven & Roloff, 1991). Moreover, individuals who mull frequently feel worse after thinking about the major problem and realized that ongoing thought does not create deeper insight into the conflict (Cloven & Roloff, 1991). Individuals who use distributive as opposed to integrative communication perceived problem seriousness and other party responsibility differently as explained below (Cloven & Roloff, 1991).

Cloven and Roloff (1991) found distributive conflict discussions led to increased effects of mulling. Distributive behaviors found in conflicts were defined as coercion and finding fault aimed at achieving one's goal by forcing the other to make a compromise (Cloven & Roloff, 1991). Similarly, individuals who mull frequently about their problems, recognize greater problem seriousness and other party responsibility when participating in conversations that use distributive behaviors (Cloven & Roloff, 1991). These are frequently accompanied with negative affect and are perceived to be competitive, nonsupportive, and critical (Cloven & Roloff, 1991, p. 139).

Whereas distributive communication amplifies negative effects of mulling, Cloven & Roloff (1991) discovered that mulling and *integrative* communication assisted conflict management. The magnification response to mulling was qualified by communication activity and frequent communication activity diluted the negative effects of excessive thought on perceptions of problem seriousness and other party blame (Cloven & Roloff, 1991). Also, the integrativeness of conflict discussion, including disclosure and cooperation focused problem solving, diminished the effects of mulling when predicting problem seriousness and blaming the other party (Cloven & Roloff, 1991).

In general, when it comes to mulling, the more an individual engages in it, the worse s/he feels. In addition, distributive conflict discussions lead to greater conflict serious and other party blame as opposed to integrative conflict discussions. While there is not much research on long distance relationships and conflict, the following section examines different aspects that may lead to conflict and hardship.

### **Long Distance Relationships**

It is crucial to know the difference between geographically close and long distance relationships when understanding the different dynamics in long distance relationships. According to Le and Agnew (2001) geographically close dating relationships are able to meet the needs for companionship, sexual activity, security and emotional involvement more effectively than long-distance dating relationships. However, the differences between geographically close and long-distance relationships had some benefits as well (Le & Agnew, 2001). Stafford, Merolla, and Castle (2005) found distance has helped some couples gain a great sense of “quality time” when they are together. They also found that college students in long-distance relationships are better rested and their performance improved academically compared to those in geographically close dating relationships (Stafford et al., 2005). They surveyed people by asking a series of open-ended questions concerning the transition to or from long-distance relationships (Stafford, et al., 2005). This study found that slightly more than half of the respondents reported feeling that closeness increased due to the distance (Stafford et al., 2005).

**Uncertainty in Long Distance Relationships.** Dainton and Aylor (2001) proposed that relational uncertainty can be linked in predicted ways with experiences of jealousy, the use of maintenance behaviors, and relational trust. They researched the relationship between

uncertainty and jealousy, trust, and maintenance in long-distance versus geographically close relationships. They projected that individuals in long-distance relationships experienced greater relational uncertainty due to the physical distance and that this distance would lead to increased jealousy, decreased use of maintenance behaviors, and decreased relational trust when compared to individuals in geographically close relationships (Dainton & Aylor, 2001, pg. 173).

Uncertainty about the relationship could be predominantly damaging to relational stability and may affect beliefs about the relationship, emotions, and communication (Dainton & Aylor, 2001). Uncertainty about the relationship is at the center of the experience of jealousy, with individuals experiencing higher levels of relational uncertainty more likely to experience jealousy (Dainton & Aylor, 2001, pg. 173). Ficara and Mongeau (2000) found seven specific sources of relational uncertainty. These include stage uncertainty, physical distance, personal distance, conflict, rival partners, sex, and sexual transgressions (Ficara & Mongeau, 2000). While any relationship is subject to face relational uncertainty, long-distance relationships have the highest likelihood for them to occur (Dainton & Aylor, 2002).

**Negative Affectivity in Long Distance Relationships.** Another variable to consider when looking at long distance relationships is negative affectivity. Cameron and Ross's (2007) research about the "neglected variable" shows the influence of individual differences on the stability of long-distance relationships. Cameron and Ross (2007) focus on negative affectivity, which is defined as a combination of one's dispositional doubt about the future, low-self esteem, and the tendency to experience negative emotions such as anxiety and depression (Cameron & Ross, 2007, pg. 582). The point of their research was to see if negative affectivity predicted the stability of long-distance and same-city relationships. The results showed that, if one was a person with negativity, being geographically distant from one's significant other enhances

interpersonal risk and stress (Cameron & Ross, 2007). Also, lower relational security and high negative affectivity were associated with reducing relational stability. Men's negative affectivity was associated with the reduction of relational stability while women's were not (Cameron & Ross, 2007).

**Communication in Long Distance Relationships.** In long distance relationships, communication is particularly important because of the lack of face-to-face communication. Chang's (2003) research found that communication technologies are a positive influence on long distance dating relationships. However, respondents who were no longer in their long distance dating relationship found that communication technology was a negative influence due to all of the miscommunication and frustration (Chang, 2003). The consistent findings demonstrated that long distance relationships take time, energy, and patience (Chang, 2003).

Stafford and Canary (1991) showed five primary maintenance strategies. These include positivity, openness, assurances, network (relying upon common friends and affiliations), and sharing tasks. These strategies have been reliable predictors of relational satisfaction and commitment (Dainton & Aylors, 2002). Dainton and Aylors (2002) found mediated communication behaviors including openness, assurances, and shared tasks were significantly related to telephone use. Similarly, oral communication such as telephone or face-to-face were functionally the same as were written communication such as letters (Dainton & Aylor, 2002). However, the internet was not seen as functional as face-to-face (Dainton & Aylor, 2002). Telephone use is positively related to relational satisfaction and commitment, while the internet is positively related to trust (Dainton & Aylors, 2002).



Long distance relationships are more complicated than geographically close relationships. There is more uncertainty, more needs go unfulfilled, there are more doubts about the future of the relationship, and communication is more susceptible to be strained because of the distance. Keeping these issues in mind, the concept of self-distancing explained below examines personally self-distancing when dealing with a conflict in person.

### **Additional Relevant Variables**

**Self-Distancing.** Taking time for self-distancing and withdrawing from the conflict may protect against rumination and the interpersonal problems associated with it (Ayduk & Kross, 2010, p. 825). Ayduk and Kross (2010) explain self-distancing as thinking of one's self as "fly on the wall" in a conflict situation to see both perspectives (p. 809). The perspective has been used to understand negative personal experiences (Ayduk & Kross, 2010). This contrasts the self-immersed perspective, which is a first person perspective that may lead to less emotional and psychological reactivity and rumination overtime (Ayduk & Kross, 2010, p. 809). The study found that spontaneous self-distancing predicated greater engagement in constructive problem-solving behavior and less correspondence of negative behavior in conflicts with romantic partners (Ayduk & Kross, 2010, p. 825).

**Gender Differences.** When researching rumination, a small difference was discovered between men and women and masculine and feminine identity roles. Coleman et al. (2009) found that masculine gender-role identities respond more aggressively than female gender-role identities to past humiliating events. Individuals with masculine gender-role identities were more likely to perceive the social norms of the scenario as privileging aggression in response to the situation compared feminine gender-role identities (p. 126). Coleman et al. (2009) determined

privileged aggression by asking participants to what extent they felt was justifiable to aggress against the humiliator. They found that people were likely to ruminate about the encounter and remain angry with aggressive intentions when they felt their actions were justified in aggressing the humiliator (Coleman et al., 2009). The central findings showed that people's perceptions of social norms and processes of rumination were central mediating factors (Coleman et al., 2009, p. 126). These perceptions of whether or not aggression was justified are the main driving reasons for anger and aggression forces of anger and intentions to aggress while rumination is a mediator of long-term intentions to act aggressively when dealing with humiliating experiences (Coleman et al., 2009, p. 127).

Whereas social norms, rumination, and aggression appear to be related to masculine gender-identity roles, rumination for women is more likely when their romantic partners use avoidance. Afif, Joseph, and Aldeis (2011) studied why women find avoidance dissatisfying compared to men. Afif et al. (2011) found that women's standards for openness in their romantic relationships are more likely to be unmet compared to men (p. 118). When this happens, women are likely to ruminate about it, which is associated with relationships dissatisfaction (Afif et al., 2011, p. 118). Overall, the study found that women become bothered more by their partner's avoidance than men (Afif et al., 2011, p. 118). Women's perceptions of their partner's avoidance during a conflict-inducing conversation were not only relationally dissatisfying right after the conversation, but also a week later after ruminating (Afif et al., 2011, p. 119).

Relationship dissatisfaction before the conversation predicted the extent to which they thought their partner was avoiding during the conversation for both men and women (Afif et al., 2011, p. 119). The view of a partner's avoidance was only dissatisfying for women. Women also tended to avoid during the conversation (Afif et al., 2011, p. 119). However, their partner's

avoidance and not their own avoidance was dissatisfying (Afif et al., 2011, p. 119). The amount of openness women wanted from their partner and their partner's avoidance tendencies when discussing the conflict was also directly associated with women's rumination and dissatisfaction the following week (Afif et al., 2011, p. 119). As Afif et al. (2011) point out, women are typically more relationship focused than men and their relationship standards may include open discussions about issues that concern their relationships (p. 119).

When women believe their partner is avoiding them, they may ruminate about why they are doing so, which may lead to dissatisfaction (Afif et al., 2011, p.120). While rumination may encourage women to talk about how dissatisfying their partner's avoidance is, any action women do because of the ruminating may be dissatisfying for them (Afif et al., 2011, p. 120). Dissatisfaction may continue whether women continue to avoid problems after they ruminate or demands to talk to their partner (Afif et al., 2011, p. 120).

**Imagined Interactions.** Taking conflict personally may be related to one's inclination to ruminate. Investigating the possible relationship between taking conflict personally and imagined interactions examines a way people react to conflict. Wallenfelsz and Hample (2010) found that people who take conflict personally tend to think about conflicts to a damaging degree. This links to negative relational effects correlated significantly with brooding and depression, which are aspects of rumination (p. 485). Similarly, individuals who find that conflict has a positive effect on relationships have pleasant imagined interactions about conflict (p. 485).

A technique some people use to work through an interpersonal conflict is imagined interactions. They imagine themselves interacting with others where they reflect distinct kinds of

thinking and where communicators experience or work through cognitive representations of conversations (Wallenfelsz & Hample, 2010, p. 471). When conducting the survey, Wallenfelsz and Hample (2010) found the most recent imagined interaction about a conflict dealt with a friend or roommate as opposed to a romantic partner (p. 484). Wallenfelsz and Hample (2010) believe there needs to be a further investigation to determine whether a predisposition to take conflict personally leads to rumination about conflict or ruminating about conflict leads to a higher degree of the three core dimensions of taking conflict personally: direct personalization, persecution feelings and stress reactions (p. 485).

### **Rationale for Study**

With the information above as a reference, there is a significant amount of research on the mulling or rumination. There is also evidence that men and women mull differently, which affects their relational satisfaction. People who take conflict personally tend to think about conflicts to excess, which correlates to aspects of rumination. Self-distancing may decrease rumination when thinking about the situation as an outsider. Long distance relationships complicate communication and are more susceptible to uncertainty and jealousy.

Using the previous research, this study will explore conflict rumination in the context of long distance relationships. We are interested in whether or not mulling relates to relational satisfaction; whether or not men and women who are in long distance relationships differ in the amount of mulling; and also if the type of relationship (family, friendship or romantic partner) show any different in the amount of mulling. The research will also build upon existing research.

RQ: Is there a difference between men and women and the amount of mulling they engage in during long distance relationships?

H1: Women will mull (ruminate) more than men after a conflict.

H2: The more one mulls (ruminates) the more unsatisfied they become.

H3: Women will be more dissatisfied (after the conflict is over) the more they mull (ruminate) compared to men.

H4: There will be a significant difference among relationship types and the amount of mulling experienced.

## **Methodology**

### **Procedure**

Upon approval from the IRB to distribute the survey, an online survey was used through SurveyMonkey to collect data. The survey was distributed online through a link sent to Facebook friends with a note for them to send the survey link to their friends. The online survey is easily accessible and reliable for collecting and saving the data collected. Respondents were anonymous and at any point in the survey they were allowed to exit the survey.

### **Respondents**

There were 177 respondents to the survey and 88 surveys used in the study. Only fully completed surveys were used because the first open-ended question was reflected in the rest of the questions. The first question asked respondents to describe a conflict they have had in a long distance relationship. Therefore, if respondents did not answer the first question, the rest of the responses were not included in the analyses because they were not validated. There were 26

males and 56 females. The majority of the respondents, 87 percent, responded as Euro-Americans.

### **Instruments**

**Nature of the communication process.** The first question asked participants to describe in detail a conflict they have had in a long distance relationship when they have been apart with either a family member, romantic partner or friend. This question is a modified version of a question used by Cloven and Roloff's (1991) research method to analyze the nature of the communication processes. This was used to get the respondents to think about a previous conflict so that they could answer the questions that followed in the survey.

In this question, long distance relationship was defined as at least 160 miles of separation. Long distance conflict was defined as conflict that occurs when participants are located in different locales, such that they cannot handle the conflict face to face. The sex of the person involved and the relationship (family member, friendship, or romantic partner) were also asked.

**Frequency of thinking about the problem.** A modified version of Cloven and Roloff's (1991) research method was also used to measure the amount of mulling participants experienced. To measure the frequency of thinking about the problem, participants described their cognitive activity on a five point scale rating how thoughts interfered with daily activity with one representing "not at all" to five representing "constantly". The other questions asked how the participant mentally appraised the problem, reflected on the problem, thought about the source of the conflict, and focused on finding a solution all measure on the same five point scale with one representing "not at all" and five representing "constantly." The next question asked about the participant emotionally responded to the problem with a five point Likert-scale with

one representing “not at all” and five representing “to a high degree.” These questions were summed to use as a high score meaning a high level of mulling and a low score meaning a low level of mulling. Reliability was with Cronbach’s Alpha was .82.

Following the model of Cloven and Roloff (1991) six additional questions explored the impact of the conflict. The participants were asked how thinking about the problem made them feel. They responded using a five point scale with one representing “much worse” and five representing “much better.” They were asked how often they discussed the conflict with others and responded using a five point scale with one representing “never” and five representing “constantly.” Participants were asked how serious they considered the conflict on a five point scale with one representing “not serious” and five representing “highly serious”. When asked who was responsible for the conflict. Participants could choose from four options including themselves, the other person involved, both of them, or neither of them.

**Relational satisfaction.** The next three questions asked the participants what their relational satisfaction levels were before the conflict, after the conflict, and their overall satisfaction with the relationship on a five point scale with one representing “not satisfied” and five representing “highly satisfied”.

**Perception of distance as a reason for conflict.** The survey ends with an open ended question asking participants what impact did being at a distance have in the final outcome of this conflict, to see if they think that the distance affected the conflict. A content analysis was used with two coders, for interrater reliability, each identified themes of impact they found in the responses. The unit of analysis was the phrase that the “impact of distance.” The coders discussed their decisions and retested until they had 100% agreement.

## Results

The research question asked if men and women were different in the amount of mulling that occurred in their long distance conflicts. The T-test was used and showed no significant difference between men and women in the amount of mulling they engage in. Similarly, H1 expected that women would ruminate more than men after a conflict and is therefore not supported.

H2 expected that mulling would be negatively correlated with satisfaction. A Pearson bivariate correlation was run and a relationship was found, but it was positive,  $r = .354$ ,  $p < .001$ . To parse the findings further, a filter was used to separate and compare men and women's scores. For men, the bivariate correlation was stronger than for women,  $r = .601$ ,  $p < .001$ ; for women, in contrast, the correlation was,  $r = .281$ ,  $p < .036$ . For men, but not for women, discussing the conflict with others was significant,  $r = .405$ ,  $p < .044$ . As men discussed the conflict with others, mulling also increased.

A Pearson Correlation was run to see if mulling related to satisfaction after the conflict and currently with the other party involved to test H3. Three questions were asked with regard to satisfaction related to before, after, and currently. Descriptive statistics showed that satisfaction diminished after the conflict, but slightly rebounded for their current satisfaction level. To verify whether mulling related to post conflict satisfaction, another correlation was run. H3 stated that the more women mull, the more dissatisfied they will be compared to men. Therefore, H3 was not supported as explained above.

A one-way ANOVA was used to compare the different relationship types (family, friend, and romantic partner) and the amount of mulling they engaged in to test H4. The results showed



that there is a significant difference between groups,  $F = 13.59$ ,  $p < .001$ . The descriptive statistics showed an increase in mean mulling scores between family ( $x = 16.63$ ,  $SD = 3.93$ ), friends ( $x = 17.44$ ,  $SD = 4.82$ ), and romantic partners ( $x = 22.00$ ,  $SD = 3.56$ ). These results supported H4.

A content analysis was used to see what impact distance had in the outcome of the conflict. We found major themes, themes that consistently were found, and minor themes, themes that were found often. The major positive theme showed that distance was a good thing for the conflict. The major negative themes showed that distance made the conflict resolution harder, created the conflict, caused the break, made the conflict more difficult, led to misinterpretation, and was more difficult due to the inability to discuss face to face. The minor positive themes showed that distance gave freedom, allowed for realization and want for break, gave self-awareness, allowed for reflection, and strengthened the relationship and communication. The minor negative themes showed that distance added unnecessary stress, caused over thinking, caused reemergence of the same conflict, left needs unfulfilled, weakened communication, was difficult due to inability to see body language, and the conflict was not resolved until face-to-face.

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to see how mulling affects conflict in a long distance relationships, relational satisfaction, and the impact of distance on a conflict. Previous research led us to expect that men and women differed in the amount of mulling. In our long-distance relationship study, we found no difference between men and women and the amount of mulling. In trying to understand this finding, two facts may be relevant. First long distance relationships are often accompanied by uncertainty (Dainton and Aylor, 2002). Perhaps the uncertainty for

both men and women contributes to an equal amount of mulling. Secondly, findings regarding sex differences are mixed. Given that we had far fewer men than women in the sample, a larger sample size might provide a better gauge for this study.

H2 speculated that mulling would be related to dissatisfaction after the conflict. This hypothesis was not supported, which was unexpected. The results found that mulling is correlated to relational satisfaction. However, findings of Cloven and Roloff (1991) showed that mulling and integrative communication assisted conflict management, which may relate to relational satisfaction. Similar to what Cloven and Roloff (1991) found, mulling and conflict management demonstrate working on the relationship, which also may relate to relational satisfaction. Further research on this finding is needed to gain more knowledge.

H3 stated that women would be more dissatisfied when the conflict was over the more they mull compared to men. As explained above, there was no difference in the amount of mulling between men and women. This was surprising because of previous research by Afif et al. (2011) that explained women became more dissatisfied after ruminating over a conversation after a week. Further research is needed to expand these results.

There was a significant difference between the types of relationships and amount of mulling experienced as predicted in H4. Specifically, romantic partners experienced the most mulling followed by friends and family. While there was no research mentioned previously, one possible explanation could be that romantic partners have more invested in the relationship and as mentioned in Stafford and Canary's (1991) research, they require a significant amount of maintenance and uncertainty is greater (Dainton & Aylor, 2002).

The major and minor themes found in response to “the impact of distance on the conflict” were similar to previous research. The major and minor positive themes found that distance could provide some benefits for the relationship. Themes related to benefits included “gave freedom, increased self-awareness, strengthened relationship and communication. These were similar to the Stafford et al.’s findings (2005). Stafford et al. (2005) found that slightly more than half of the respondents reported feeling that closeness increased due to the distance.

Major and minor negative themes found distance made the conflict resolution harder, created conflict, caused break, lead to misinterpretation, difficult due to lack of face-to-face, added unnecessary stress, over-thinking and reemergence of conflict.

The majority of these themes are found in the previous research. Chang (2003) found communication technology added to miscommunication and frustration. These findings echo characteristics of uncertainty according to Ficara and Mongeau (2000) including physical distance, personal distance, conflict, rival partners, sex, and sexual transgressions. Cameron and Ross (2007) found that negativity increased interpersonal stress, which could also add to the conflict as demonstrated by the themes. These findings on conflict in distance relationship add to the previous research of long distance relationships and focuses on the conflict aspect of the relationship.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Limitations for this study first derive from the sample. Using Facebook to distribute the survey limited the study to a select network of people instead of having a broad and diverse audience. While I received a high response rate, the respondents were not diverse and that may influence the findings. The majority of the respondents were the same race, from the same

economic status, around the same age, and from the northwest. Changing these variables may change the results of this study. Increased participation of men would also help. Future studies should consider this and expand their potential audience.

Another limitation was the satisfaction scale that was used in this study. The scale only asked three questions about satisfaction before and after the conflict as well as the overall satisfaction with the relationship. A more in depth satisfaction scale should be used in the future, so that it can be reverse coded. Also, future research needs to explore effective ways of dealing with mulling when it occurs in long distance relationships and how to make that information available to those who need it.

An additional investigation is needed to explore the relationship between discussing the conflict and mulling, as this was a significant correlation that was found. Similarly, further research is needed to explore why discussing the conflict with others increased mulling in males, as this was another significant correlation that was found.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study demonstrate that mulling or ruminating over a conflict may not be damaging to the relationship, what happens may depend on conflict style. When ruminating over a conflict, think of integrative communication strategies to problem solve. This study also found that for distance relationships, regardless of sex, there is no difference in the amount of mulling that occurs. Therefore, if there is a conflict, both men and women may ruminate in various ways. The last main finding found that romantic partners in long distance relationships might mull or ruminate more than if the other person is a friend or family member. Another take-away of this study is the importance for long-distance relationships of the five primary

maintenance strategies (positivity, openness, assurances, network, and sharing tasks), as these strategies are reliable predictors of relational satisfaction and commitment. While the effect of mulling over a conflict in a long distance relationship may bring unnecessary stress and add to the conflict, it may strengthen the relationship and improve satisfaction.

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**Appendix**

Long Distance Conflict and the Aftermath

Thank you so much for your willingness to take my survey. A long distance conflict is a conflict that occurs when the participants are located in different locales, such that they cannot handle the conflict face to face.

Please describe in detail a conflict you've had in a long distance relationship when you've been apart with either a family member, romantic partner or friend. (Long distance relationship defined as at least 160 miles of separation.) Please include details of the interaction and any subsequent episodes of the conflict.

Sex of the person involved in conflict:

1	2
Male	Female

Was the person a family member, friend, or romantic partner?

1	2	3
Family member	Friend	Romantic Partner

My thoughts interfered with my daily activity:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	Somewhat	Moderate	A lot	Constantly

I mentally appraised the problem:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	Somewhat	Moderate	A lot	Constantly

I reflected on the problem:



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1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	Somewhat	Moderate	A lot	Constantly

I thought about the source of the conflict:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	Somewhat	Moderate	A lot	Constantly

I focused on trying to find a solution:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	Somewhat	Moderate	A lot	Constantly

I emotionally responded to the problem:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	Somewhat	Moderate	Significantly	To high degree

Thinking about the problem made me feel:

1	2	3	4	5
Much worse	Somewhat worse	Neither better nor worse	Somewhat better	Much better

How often did you discuss the conflict with others:

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Once in a while	Sometimes	A lot	Constantly

I considered this conflict

1	2	3	4	5
Not serious	A little serious	Somewhat serious	Very serious	Highly serious

Who was responsible for the conflict:

1	2	3	4
I was	The other person	Both of us	Neither of us

How satisfied were you with your relationship before the conflict:

1	2	3	4	5
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Not satisfied                  Somewhat                  Moderately                  Very satisfied                  Highly Satisfied

How satisfied were you with your relationship after the conflict:

1                                  2                                  3                                  4                                  5

Not satisfied                  Somewhat                  Moderately                  Very satisfied                  Highly Satisfied

Overall, how satisfied are you with your relationship:

1                                  2                                  3                                  4                                  5

Not satisfied                  Somewhat                  Moderately                  Very satisfied                  Highly satisfied

In your opinion, what impact did being at a distance have in the final outcome of this conflict?

Age:

1. 18-20
2. 20-23
3. 24-30
4. 30 and beyond

Sex: 1=male

2=female

Ethnicity:

1. African-American
2. Hispanic
3. Native American or Pacific Islander
4. Euro-American
5. Other \_\_\_\_\_

